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ABSTRACT

The teaching of parliamentary procedure as proposed in this paper is based on three areas of instruction--expository and persuasive speaking, organizing clubs and writing constitutions, and conducting business according to the 11 principles of parliamentary procedure. These areas, usually presented in sequence, are designed to (1) teach students to think logically and to write and speak clearly and concisely, (2) provide background in the history of parliamentary law, (3) offer practice in the correct procedures for making and passing motions, and (4) give students an opportunity to organize clubs and write constitutions both as a class exercise and in real life. Frequent practice sessions, primarily using role playing and drill, are described and suggested as a means of insuring the retention of the principles and rules of parliamentary procedure. (JM)

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Methods of Teaching Parliamentary Procedure

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Because oral communication covers such a wide spectrum, teachers tend to include in their high school classes only those areas in which they have had direct training and practical experience. Justifiably they shy away from including in their courses debate and dramatics, for examples, unless they have themselves engaged in these. For the same reason, they apparently often omit parliamentary procedure because as students they have had no specific instruction in this, and subsequently they have had no experience as officers in organizations requiring the practice of parliamentary rules.

It would seem, however, that all teachers certified to teach speech would have had instruction and training in parliamentary procedure. Yet, in preparing for this paper, I checked through speech methods texts and guides and was surprised to find the number of these that either omitted parliamentary procedure altogether or devoted no more than a page or two to it. Perhaps the writers of methods texts have felt that any corpus of knowledge as circumscribed by rules as is parliamentary procedure would automatically lend itself to a step-by-step method of teaching, and consequently saw little need for devoting space to suggestions for teaching it.

If a teacher feels unprepared to teach in this area, he should not let this deter him. His lack of knowledge and skills in parliamentary procedure will not handicap his students if he frankly works with them to learn it.

Loren Reid in his methods text, Teaching Speech, tells that during all his college years he had never had any direct instruction in parliamentary procedure before he began his first teaching in a school where his predecessor had specialized in this. Parliamentary procedure for students in this school had evolved into a ritual so that preoccupation with rules and their precise working was more important than using their knowledge of the rules in disposing of the problems of real life. Dr. Reid, nevertheless, taught parliamentary procedure in his first course, and by taking it step by step, by making sure that students understood the rationale underlying the rules for the procedures, by breaking the instructional periods into small segments, he taught it well; and he became more proficient in the procedure, as did his students. Teachers who are not knowledgeable in this phase of speech communication can learn with their students while teaching it.

This does not mean that teaching parliamentary procedure is quite that simple. For parliamentary procedure is an exceedingly complex activity and the skills involved in practicing it are indivisible, just as they are in all facets of oral communication, speaking and listening. But instruction in the skills requires frequent, specific, and independent attention to one or more of its facets. The problem is that there are so many facets to orderly, group deliberation in accordance with democratic principles. It includes, in addition to technical and language skills, requirements of leadership and responsibilities of membership, the techniques of problem solving and expository and persuasive communication. Although these are integrated in teaching other communicative processes, as well as in teaching parliamentary procedure, there must be separate instruction on the various facets of these processes.

I divide parliamentary procedure into three areas of instruction for this specific attention. The first primarily involves speaking for expository and persuasive purposes; the second, organizing clubs and writing constitutions for them; and the third, conducting business according to the eleven principles of parliamentary procedure. Obviously these areas are not discrete, but many teachers give separate instruction in them by a carefully integrated combination of theory, practice, and criticism. I cannot prescribe any particular time in the course when this subject is introduced. This varies among teachers and with individual teachers from year to year. Some prefer to concentrate on teaching it at the beginning of a course. Others like to introduce it in connection with debate; others with a unit on persuasive speaking. Often the time when it is introduced, depends upon current needs of the students and upon what is happening in the school or in the news.

If teachers are concerned about the time it takes to teach parliamentary procedure effectively, they should not use this as another excuse for neglecting this important phase of speech communication. Compensation for the time spent should be to the teacher a realization that he is reinforcing, through practice in this area, the fundamentals of speech, i.e., the ability to do research, to organize, to think, to use words with precision and vividness, to use the voice and body to communicate, and to maintain a reciprocal relationship between the speaker and the listener. I think this will be apparent as I describe the three phases of teaching parliamentary procedure.

It is unimportant to me whether or not I follow the first phase of parliamentary procedure immediately with the other two. Depending upon the interests and the involvement of students in other speech activities, some time may elapse before I move on to the second phase and from there to the third phase of this procedure. Actually, to make sure that students have the needed repetition to know instantly how to participate in a parliamentary meeting, I spread the teaching of the third phase, that of practice in passing the various kinds of motions, throughout the course.

While teachers prefer to teach parliamentary procedure with a unit of debate, I prefer to begin the unit after teaching one on general semantics, thought processes, and thinking in speech. I begin by making an assignment on persuasive and expository speaking. I try to motivate this study and practice by requiring students to write in the form of a motion a change they desire to see made in their school rules or customs. These are then edited. I have found that many of my advanced students have trouble writing a clear, concise motion without help in editing. Students then defend their motions with at least three logical reasons, clearly explained, showing the need for and visualizing the satisfactory results if the motion is adopted. They must begin these speeches by stating the motion and then saying, "I wish to defend the motion for the following reasons. . ." Instead of speaking only in defense of motions they propose, some students choose to work in pairs, one defending, the other opposing the motion.

A motion proposed by one of my students this year was: "I move that in the event of a tie in the all city football contest, the present method of determining the winner on the basis of first downs and yardage gained be changed to extending the game until the tie is broken."

Another, a most ambitious student, proposed using the last hour of the day as a free period for independent study. His motion read: "I move that the last hour of each school day be free for the student to do research, to take field trips, to work in classrooms, or to engage in any other activity that will benefit him as a student." He stated, "I believe this motion should be adopted for three reasons:

(1.) It is advantageous to both teachers and students
(2.) It is possible to put into effect without making drastic changes in the schedule we now have
(3.) It will allow us to utilize other tax supported institutions for learning".

Other motions had to do with lengthening the lunch and passing periods, returning to a floating schedule of classes, the dress code, and requirements for school elective offices.

As you can readily see, this assignment teaches persuasive and expository speaking which can be applied in many situations wherein a speaker wants particular action from his listeners, and specifically in a parliamentary group to get desired action on proposals.

In teaching a unit on parliamentary procedure, many teachers like to impress upon students the fact that the development of parliamentary law goes far back in the history of mankind. I tell my students that it began with the ancient German assemblies wherein everyone had a voice, because for practical purposes of learning this unit, we are not much interested in the Stone Age. This background teaching is usually done by lecture and by assigning reports to the faster learners. These include finding out where some of the eleven principles and practices of parliamentary procedure first evolved, such as the quorum, the concept of the majority, reading of minutes to inform everyone what is going on, the committee system, persuasive eloquence, precedence of motions, the close relationship between democratic and parliamentary principles.

Other research and reports teachers require are the place of voluntary associations in a free society, from reading Chapter 25 of Alec de Toqueville's Democracy in America; Henry Robert's biography and the popularity of his Rules of Order; Thomas Jefferson's contribution to the body of knowledge of parliamentary procedure; early parliamentary groups and those with a long history, such as the Islandic Althing; the evolution of British parliamentary law; present-day American Parliamentary authorities. Teachers assign other reports to students who volunteer to attend meetings of legislative bodies and civic organizations.

I prefer assigning these reports at the beginning of the second phase of this unit, that of organizing a club, writing the constitution, electing officers for it, and preparing agenda for meetings.

In this phase of the unit, teachers often require students to organize a parent club for the purpose of gaining practice in parliamentary procedures. Then subsidiary organizations can be formed to give experience in this phase of the subject. Having a parent organization eliminates the time-consuming election of a temporary chairman and secretary. The constitution for the parent club can provide opportunity for giving many members of the class experience in filling different offices, particularly in serving as chairman.

Often without the suggestion from me about forming a parent club, some sharp student will see the advantage of this plan and will propose such an organization. A student in one of my classes did so last fall.

If students have a need for a specific club, and it can be a permanent one, it is good to make this assignment for real. Otherwise, I think it is more artificial to trump up a club than it is to role-play organizing the class into a group for a specific purpose. Some proposed by my students last spring under the aegis of a student teacher, were ridiculous, but the students entered into the project with enthusiasm, and I believe learned a great deal. A student in one class moved that the class organize a riding club. After his motion was seconded, he learned in the debate that followed, that although he had in mind a horseback riding club, others in the group were considering riding on and in everything from bicycles to antique cars.

A student in another group was obviously testing the student teacher. He obtained the floor, said, "I move that . . . "; then, as he looked at the acoustical ceiling in an attempt to find out what he moved, he finished by saying ". . . we form a club to plug up the holes in the ceiling." Another student who liked to hear his

voice seconded the motion. There followed a lengthy debate on whether or not they should plug up the holes in only the classroom ceiling or in all acoustical ceilings; whether they should also plug up rat holes or any kind of holes; whether they should plug holes only upon request of the owners; and so on until a motion to form such an organization was finally postponed indefinitely.

During this mock serious debate, students had practice in passing just about every motion on their charts. So you can see, these phases of teaching parliamentary procedure are not discrete.

As a time saver in writing a constitution and in order to give everyone practice, I divide the class into pairs to write different parts of the constitution. A committee prepares an agenda for the meetings, and I require students to memorize the usual order of business.

The third phase of teaching parliamentary procedure, that of teaching the correct procedures for passing the various kinds of motions is, in a sense, the crucial phase; for without knowledge of parliamentary forms and rules, students don't function well, that is they neither accept their responsibilities nor exercise their rights in a group using these procedures.

I begin this phase by giving several handouts: two charts showing the classification of motions according to precedence and according to purpose, a worksheet giving the eleven principles of parliamentary procedure, followed by questions requiring students to list the motions according to the four classifications, main, subsidiary, privileged, and incidental, and to tell the principles underlying each. I also expect students on this worksheet to explain why a motion requires a two-thirds majority and why a simple majority. I give a pre-test and give the same test again at the end of the unit. I show films, not at first, but after they have had some practice; for the films are more meaningful then. I supply each student a programmed text so that he can work at his own speed. I strongly recommend class sets of Sturgis Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedures. In this, students find the occasion and the language for proposing the motions they might wish to have acted upon.

Most teachers feel that success in teaching this phase of parliamentary procedure depends upon drill and repetition. All of this drill is in terms of need, that is, the action that a member wishes to have taken, or the results of a proposal if it is passed by the group. Students are asked, for example: "What motion would you propose if

(a) You wish a small group to investigate the proposal and recommend action?
(b) You wish to question the speaker?
(c) You wish to test the strength of the motion without voting on the motion itself?
(d) You want to change the order of business?
(e) Someone proposes a motion upon which the group has no authority to act?

During this part of the study, and at any time they are ready, I require students to report and criticize procedures in organizations to which they belong. I ask them to suggest in their criticisms other actions which might have been taken and to consider whether or not incorrect procedures violated the principles. I caution students not to let the formality of the procedures interfere with the purpose, to keep in mind always that parliamentary procedures are to expedite, not to impede transaction of business. They learn from this kind of observing and reporting that if there is unanimity, the chairman may by-pass certain procedures to expedite business and, in an informal meeting, "Bob, I'd like to know what's going on?" accomplishes the same result as "Request for information".

Another handout I give students in this initial teaching of motions according to precedence and purpose is a vocabulary list of about sixty words and terms they will soon encounter and which might be unfamiliar to them, terms such as plurality, precedence, statute, viva voce, sine die, ex officio, previous question, dilatory tactics. I request students to record in their notebooks the context in which they hear the terms, and, if necessary for their understanding of them, the dictionary definitions of these words.

Incidentally I am a firm believer in a greatly expanded vocabulary as a general objective of a speech communication course. This development should occur with each unit studied.

Any procedure as circumscribed by rules as parliamentary procedure can best be learned through actual practice. In drill on passing motions, teachers have many devices for seeing that all students get practice. One devise is changing presiding officers often; another is using lotteries, that is, having drawings of cards on which are designated various kinds of motions. The student must manage to propose the motion listed on the card he has drawn.

Although I allow students free imagination in the kinds of clubs they practice organizing, in the second phase of this study, I make sure that the motions proposed in this third phase are relevant to what is happening in their lives now. In this way, students get more involved in making all kinds of motions. We often use proposals brought up in Student Council meetings. Especially lucrative this year in supplying motions of this kind was a Council project to re-write requirements for holding various kinds of extra-class offices. Other motions we have used this year are those determining a point system for Thespian membership including points for excellent grades in speech class and for school dramatic activities, and finding ways to cope with infractions of school rules, and policies.

Throughout the course, students need repetition of practice periods. Many teachers are prepared for this during those five or ten minute intervals that frequently come up at the end of a performance class period when some performers are conveniently, or inconveniently, absent on that day. I keep at hand several sets of cards on which are listed various kinds of motions for students to draw from the set. These are numbered in order. When proposing a motion indicated by the card he has drawn, the student prefaces his motion by stating his number. Other motions, not on the cards, may be made between numbered motions. By stating his number before he proposes a motion, the one next in line knows he is free at any time he can get recognition to propose his motion. Some of these numbered motions may be out of order to test the alertness of the chairman or the membership.

Many of these practice sessions, especially those with no directive other than the first main motion to be proposed, I record on tape so that we can stop anywhere in playing the tape to consider what might have been or should have been done. Some of these are played for evaluation in other classes or for models to use in the initial teaching.

This leads us to the question of how we as teachers can best evaluate our efforts to teach parliamentary procedure. As I have indicated before, the written tests should be in terms of need and of the principles involved. Perhaps one of the tests is reports of co-workers about how well students are functioning in extra-school organizations and reports of students about meetings of these organizations. Another test is the enthusiasm of students for the practice periods. If a student complains of being tired of this study and wants to move on to something else while the majority still seem to be involved, I immediately give that student the chairman's position. Invariably he demonstrates he needs the practice more than others, and he changes his mind about being in a hurry to change to study another area of speech communication.

Finally, if students do well in a pop session several months after the concentrated study on parliamentary procedure, teachers can rate themselves well on teaching it, and they can be assured that they need to have less frequent drills. Certainly if students do well on these pop sessions teachers can indulge in a little self-gratification that they have given their students a tool for democratic action that will serve them throughout life.